Jane and Josephine: The Lady and Her Maid
By Yu May and Anonymous

In the golden light of a late afternoon, Lady Jane sat in her chamber at court, a book open on her lap. She had spent the day in religious instruction and appearances among the courtiers, yet her thoughts kept drifting to her new lady's maid—Josephine de Beauregard, the strange French girl freshly pulled from an abbey and thrust into service. Josephine was unlike any servant Jane had known: short, sun-kissed, freckled, with her ruddy hair still cropped short from monastic life, and an insolent spark in her eyes that both unsettled and fascinated the young noblewoman.

Josephine lounged on the windowsill, a book balanced carelessly in one hand. She yawned. “M’lady, I’m afraid your books are all mortally dull.” She flashed a mischievous look, her skin glowing warm in the setting sun. “Come outside with me—unless you prefer to sit embroidering like an old crone?”

Lady Jane sniffed. “You should be thankful. Not many girls know how to read. I was reading about Queen Boudicca. You know, it strikes me how much she’s like our Elizabeth. The Queen who saved us from Rome.” She folded the book. “But I suppose a little sunlight couldn’t hurt. Let’s take the air.”

Josephine set her book down haphazardly and stood, stretching. “Pfft. Saved us from Rome. As if Rome ever truly left.” She extended her arm. “Come, the gardens are lovely this time of day. You could use a bit of sunshine on your pale face, m’lady.”

They walked together, Josephine guiding them along paths that avoided other courtiers. The looks she drew were unmistakable. Her shorn hair and foreign air marked her as an oddity at court.

Lady Jane listened to the birdsong. “It’s lovely, isn’t it? To hear all of God’s creatures, great and small. I’ve missed this.”

Josephine hiked up her skirts with both hands, revealing a brief glimpse of lace-trimmed bloomers that fell to her knees, and sat beneath a twisting willow tree. The scrawny maid looked up wanly at the branches above. “The abbey had trees just like this in the garden. I’d study under them when the sun shone, or climb right up into the branches whenever the Mistress was cross…” She chuckled. “...Then perch there like a bird until she fetched a monk to haul me down.”

Lady Jane looked horrified. “Goodness! Climbing trees? Whatever were you thinking? I hope you learned your lesson.”

Josephine threw her head back in laughter, eyes shimmering. “My lady! How utterly sheltered you are. And to think I was the one meant to be a lady of God!” Her eyes sparkled with mischief. “You’d make a far better nun than I ever did, ma chère. All obedience and no climbing.”

Josephine’s expression was jovial, but there was a teasing lilt to her words, the subtle French accent slipping through.

Lady Jane tried to look stern. “That’s no way to speak to me! And I’d never submit to Popish doctrines. I’m just glad you’re free of them. Luther was right. The clergy shouldn’t be forbidden from marrying. Mind your tongue or I’ll…” She trailed off, searching for a threat. “…or I’ll have to smack you!”

Josephine raised her eyebrows. “Careful, my sweet lady. It’s just as unbecoming for you to shout as for me to climb trees, non?” She purred, taking Jane’s hand and turning it over like a curiosity. “You’d shatter your little hand! So soft…not a single day of honest work in its life.”

Lady Jane pulled her hand away. “Don’t test my patience. Or I’ll show you just how soft my hands are…” She took a deep breath. “I’m sorry for shouting at you.”

Josephine giggled, looking her lady up and down. “Doesn’t exactly strike fear, now, does it? I take it for certain you’ve never truly ruled over anybody except your father’s servants, hmm?”

Lady Jane looked taken aback. “I… hold on, you were a novice nun. Who have you ‘ruled over’? Other poor girls they made take Papist vows?”

Josephine purred, “I never ‘ruled’ over anybody. I just ran errands for the Abbess and the monks. Got into a few scraps with the other girls a few times—good memories! …Well, until the Priest took a birch to each of us in turn for fighting in the Lord’s house.” She shuddered.

Lady Jane huffed. “Served you right. My papa once smacked me for fighting with my younger cousin…and it made me a better person. Frankly, sometimes I think you could use a smacking, the way you carry on.”

Josephine huffed in return. “I could say the same about you. I wonder if you’ll use that tone with your future husband… he’d paint your bum bright red, ma petite.” She mused, tilting her head. “Men don’t much care for bossy girls. That’s why I shall never marry—too much trouble.”

Lady Jane crossed her arms. “Well… if I ever marry, and speak to him so disrespectfully, I hope he whips me, too.” She stood. “I’ve had my fill of fresh air. I want to read about Boudicca killing Romans.”

Josephine leaned forward eagerly. “You hope?!” She stood and extended her arm. “I never knew English girls could be so naughty with their lovers.”

Jane blinked at the word *naughty*. “I won’t be a naughty wife. I’ll be a good wife.”

“No, no, my dear, I mean…” Josephine paused, her lips curling. “...Coquine, scandalous, exciting.” Josephine pulled Jane to her feet, dusting off her own skirt with a playful swat. “The sort who finds a whipping as thrilling as a lover’s kiss.”

Jane blushed, glancing around the garden. “No! You mustn’t discuss kissing here. That’s a matter for…well, plays by the Bard.” Then the meaning struck her. “Wait, a whipping? But… a whipping hurts.”

“Of course it does. I hardly understand it myself!” Josephine agreed. “But I’ve read enough books and heard enough cries of anguish bordering on utter rapture during penance to know.”

Lady Jane held up a hand, her face pale. “Silence. I don’t want to hear about those brutish Catholics. Imagine, whipping poor girls til they bleed. Papa once told me the monks used to whip themselves as a form of penance. Can you believe it? We have Christ alone as the penance for our sins. There’s no need to abuse ourselves.” Jane felt light-headed. “I need to lie down. I’ll need you to help me undress.”

As Jane led the way back to her private chamber, Josephine bristled and followed. “Only as barbaric as hanging women for supposed ‘witchcraft’ and beheading our leadership!” Her voice rose before she clamped her mouth shut.

They reached Lady Jane’s bedchamber, and Josephine opened the door, her eyes smoldering. As Lady Jane held up her hands, Josephine marched forward and began roughly helping Jane undress, with brusque movements. “I’ll have you know, I was whipped, but not til I bled. And the penitents *chose* to flog themselves—nobody forced it upon them. You should try speaking to one of us before judging our ways.”

Lady Jane turned to glance at the maid, raising an eyebrow. “One of *us*, you say. Do you mean, one of us Catholics? I thought you renounced their doctrines?”

Josephine froze, fingers tightening on the buttons. She took a shaky breath. “Slip of the tongue. I’m not used to this...English?” She paused. “…Please, don’t tell anybody. I’d hate to lose my head. I’m rather fond of it.”

Lady Jane sighed. “Do not fear. There are plenty of Catholics in hiding, even in the royal court. But I pray for your soul. It would be best to be more…discreet.”

Josephine relaxed slightly. “You’re not bad, for a Protestant. S’pose Her Majesty is rather fond of you. I hope she finds you a kind husband, who never lays a hand on you.” She spoke softly, unlacing Jane’s formal, outer gown.

As she helped Lady Jane stepped out of the expansive skirt, Josephine smiled. “You know, chérie, I could give you some tricks on enticing suitors. I practiced it with girls at the abbey.” She giggled and sat on the bed, crossing her legs. “Anyone you have your eye on?”

Lady Jane blinked. “Practiced…with girls? Practiced what?”

“Well…kisses, greetings, flirtation, the art of enticement. Here, pretend I’m a lord you fancy. Romance me!” Josephine puffed up her chest in imitation of a stern lord.

Lady Jane looked around, as if hoping for rescue. “M-my Lord! You have…such lovely eyes?”

Josephine stood quickly, grabbed a stool to gain height, seized Jane by the waist, and dipped her dramatically. “Oh, my dear, you look positively ravishing this fine evening. Shall we retire to my quarters for the night?”

Jane struggled free. “What? Of course not! Why, if you were a man I’d…” She raised a hand as if to strike, then lowered it. “No, I know you were only playing, but it’s not right to joke that way. Being alone with a man in his quarters. If anyone heard you speak that way…” She straightened, adopting her most authoritative tone. “Josephine, if you speak that way in my presence again, I will be forced to—to *spank* you.”

Josephine raised her brows, still perched on the stool, then burst out laughing. “You?! I’m sorry, my dear, I just—Oh, *mon dieu, pardonne-moi!* You’re just so…cute and dainty. I’d pity your little hand!”

Lady Jane seated herself on the bed and patted her lap. “That does it. Josephine, you are incorrigible. Come lie across my lap for correction, at once.”

There was nothing playful in Jane’s tone of voice. It was a simple, direct order.

Josephine stopped laughing, her mouth agape. “My lady, I thought you were only joking.”

The maid hesitated. Direct disobedience would earn Josephine a sound caning from the head maid, and both of them knew it. Finally, Josephine folded her hands behind her back, reluctantly approached, and slowly lay herself down across Jane’s lap. Josephine thrilled as she felt the soft plushness of Lady Jane’s thighs through her chemise. Propping up on her elbows, Josephine glanced back, mischievously. “Have you done this before?”

Josephine already knew the answer was no. Given Jane’s lack of experience, maybe she’d falter at the last moment. Nevertheless, Josephine felt a churning in her belly, and forced herself to ignore it.

Lady Jane swallowed and laid an arm across Josephine’s lower back to hold her in place. “…Never you mind.” She took a deep breath and patted Josephine’s bottom through the thick

canvas skirt. “I warned you, twice, to mind your tongue, so I’m afraid that, to impress upon you the gravity of your error…” Jane lifted the hem of Josephine’s skirt to reveal the linen shift. “…I will have to spank you over your shift!”

Josephine squeezed her fingers into the duvet, resting her cheek against her folded arm. She could tell that Jane was second-guessing herself, just by the sad hint in her lady’s voice. Josephine tried to affect a pleading, sorrowful look. “Lady Jane, I was only *teasing*.”

For good measure, Josephine affected a pout. “Of course, I wouldn’t dare disobey you, but this is simply too cruel!”

Her voice was fussy, but she didn’t resist as she felt the hem of her skirt neatly folded across her back.

Lady Jane swallowed a lump in her throat, then steeled herself. She abhorred the very idea of willfully inflicting pain on someone, but she remembered something her father had taught her: always take a firm hand with the staff, or they won’t respect you.

That settled the matter. Jane landed a smack across Josephine’s bottom at half strength, with a soft pop. “So were you only teasing when you said my delicate little hand would shatter if I tried to smack you? If that’s true, then you have nothing to worry about. If you didn’t mean it, just apologize and we’ll say no more about it. Otherwise…” She patted her maid’s backside experimentally, feeling the soft texture of Josephine’s undergarments. “We’ll find out just how soft my palm is. It’s your choice. I don’t want to hurt you, Josephine. But I won’t be mocked.”

Josephine jumped slightly, but settled back down. The first swat barely stung. She crossed her arms and rested her chin on them. “…It certainly feels rather soft,” she teased, crossing her ankles. “My lady, I wasn’t *mocking*. I was *playing*.”

Lady Jane landed a harder spank this time, with more effort. Josephine’s eyes popped open as she felt the sting keenly, even through the fabric.

Jane waved her hand, trying to get a feel for how to use her wrist. “I’m *not* playing. Your words are like barbed arrows…” She landed another stroke, steadier than before, and deliberately put more force of her arm behind it. “How would you like it if I called you…soft?”

Jane’s hand lingered a moment on the surprisingly plush curve of Josepihne’s behind, before she quickly pulled her hand back.

Josephine huffed. “Barbed arrows!? Isn’t that a bit dramatic—Oh!!” A third swat startled Josephine, but she kept her composure, and answered in her customary teasing voice. “I’d take it as a compliment, dear. Then I’d laugh because I knew you were lying.”

Jane's only response was to land a fourth firm slap across the seat of Josephine's bloomers, followed by two more in quick succession.

Josephine hissed through her teeth. "I truly never meant to insult you, my lady…"

So far, this spanking was nothing compared to a birching over the bare bottom, but still…Josephine had to admit that Jane was making an effort.

Lady Jane's hand faltered in mid-air. She remembered a line from *The Merchant of Venice*. "And earthly power doth then show likest God's, when mercy seasons justice…" She spoke it aloud by accident, then cleared her throat. "…In that case, Josephine, a simple apology will suffice… this time."

"Huh?" Josephine looked over her shoulder, her frizzy hair flopping from the motion. Then, Josephine narrowed her eyes. "…Once again, milady, I fear you are being awfully dramatic."

Then, her cheeks blushed pink, and she bowed her head slightly. "But…I am sincerely sorry if I offended you."

Lady Jane flexed her fingers, then she patted Josephine's backside playfully. "Dramatic am I?"

Josephine held her tongue, waiting in suspense. Jane eyed the defenseless girl's slender bottom. Finally, Jane sighed. "I'll choose to take that remark as a compliment. After all, I am quite fond of the theatre…And I accept your apology."

Josephine felt the delicate hold on her back release.

Josephine quickly scrambled up, rubbing the faint tingle as she pulled her skirt down. "You would be," she chuckled to herself, then sat primly, perching herself on Jane's lap. "And thank you, dear."

As Lady Jane nodded, she smiled softly, looking rather pleased with herself. "You're welcome! The spanking seems to have done wonders for your attitude already!" She hesitated, then patted Josephine's shoulder. "I'm sorry I had to do that, but I'm ready to move on. Can we be friends again?"

Josephine looked taken aback, still reeling with a mix of anger and admiration.*"So, this spoiled little lady actually dared to strike me!"* thought Josephine.

But Josephine carefully composed her face, and answered with mock properness. "Well, it was more so the *talking* that helped me realize. Of course you're still my friend, but I would prefer it if you didn't strike me. That would be rather disagreeable, no?"

Lady Jane held Josephine's hand in hers. "I hate that I had to do that. Yes, let's not repeat it. I hope the smacking taught you to mind your tongue better in future!"

Josephine thrilled at the gentleness of the gesture, but she caught the hidden meaning behind Jane's comforting words. Cleary, Lady Jane wasn't the least bit sorry for spanking Josephine.

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Josephine waited until Lady Jane's nose was buried in a book, then slipped out of the lady's chamber as quietly as a shadow, shutting the door behind her with a soft click. Evening was coming, which meant lights out for all of the serving class. Candlelight was a luxury only the nobility could afford.

The corridor was dim, lit only by the gentle glow of rushlights. She casually unhooked one of the metal rods that held the burning rushes, then climbed up to the small attic room allotted to her: a narrow space with a single stool and pallet bed. She shut the door beneath her, set down the burning rushes in a clay jar, sat gingerly down on her pallet, and let out a long, shaky breath.

"Mon Dieu," she muttered, pressing a hand to her chest as though to still her racing heart. "What just happened?"

She turned sideways, and without ceremony hiked up her skirts and shift in one quick motion. Twisting, she peered over her shoulder at her own backside. In the weak light the skin looked barely pinked—nothing like the deep crimson she remembered from abbey days when the Mistress or a monk had laid on the birch with real intent. A faint warmth lingered, more of a soft tingle than a true ache, yet the memory of Lady Jane's small, hesitant hand landing those swats made her cheeks burn hotter than any sting.

She let the fabric fall and sat gingerly on the edge of the pallet, wincing more from indignation than pain.

"So that's how it is," she said aloud to the empty room, voice low and sharp. "The little Protestant princess decides she can play disciplinarian. Putting me—me!—over her lap like some naughty kitchen maid. And those pathetic taps…" Josephine gave a short, incredulous laugh. "She thinks that counts as correction? I've had worse from a feather duster."

She rubbed at the spot absently, scowling. "She enjoyed it, though. I could feel it. The way her breath caught, the little tremble in her arm when she tried to sound stern. She wanted to do it. And then—pouf!—she turns merciful, quoting Shakespeare like some saintly schoolmistress. Mercy seasons justice, indeed. Sacrebleu, if she only knew how close I came to punching her right on the nose."

Josephine flopped backward onto the thin mattress, arms flung wide, staring up at the low rafters. "Revenge!" she whispered, darkly, savoring the word.

She would have to wait for the right moment: catch Jane in some small disobedience, perhaps whisper a rumor close to the right ear, or simply tease her mercilessly. She murmured. “How easy it would be just to pin her down…”

Josephine sat up, and pantomimed the act of putting a spoiled lady across her knee. “...Flip up those dainty skirts, and give her a proper *fessée*. Let her feel what a real thrashing feels like, from someone who isn’t worried about bruising a noble little backside. See how pretty she looks then, with tears staining her cheeks.”

The thought sent a strange, guilty thrill curling through her belly. She rolled onto her side, hugging her knees.

But the longer she lay there, the sharper the image grew in her mind. Lady Jane’s wide, startled eyes, the pleading and protests, and finally…the sight of Lady Jane’s noble little *fesse*, blushing bright red. Josephine had read that the Spanish used the term *sangre azul* to describe their nobility: pale, blue blooded. “I wonder if Lady Jane’s buttocks would blush bright blue instead.”

Josephine sulked as she remembered her own spanking. On the one hand, it wasn’t that bad, but that only made it more annoying. “She didn’t even have the courtesy to finish it properly.”

As the last of the rushlight died out, Josephine covered her bottom, and lay in bed. “She’s barely out of the nursery herself. Sheltered as a hothouse rose. Probably never even seen a proper birching, never mind felt one. Her papa gave her a smack or two, maybe, but nothing like the abbey. She thinks she’s being fierce, but she’s only…play-acting. *Maladroite.* Clumsy.”

Josephine sighed. “Non. I won’t be cruel. Not yet. Not to her.”

She sat up slowly, folded her hands in her lap, and bowed her head the way the nuns had taught her. She wasn’t sure if God could hear her. Sometimes she wondered what sort of God could possibly abandon his church to heresy, but Josephine prayed every night, regardless.

“Seigneur,” she whispered, “*Dieu qui voit tout*…You know my heart. You know I’ve borne worse than a few love-taps from a girl who doesn’t know her own strength. But if it pleases you, if you are truly just… give me the chance. Just once. Let me teach Lady Jane a lesson. Let her learn what it feels like to be small and weak and sorry over someone else’s knee. Not to hurt her, mon Dieu—not truly. Just to *show* her. Amen.”

She crossed herself quickly, almost defiantly. Darkness folded around her, as though either Heaven itself, or perhaps Hell itself, might be considering granting her request.

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After finishing her devotions, Lady Jane knelt upon the rush-strewn floor of her chamber, the cold stone biting through the thin wool of her nightgown and into her knees. She had put out the last candle some time ago, leaving only the faint silver light of a full moon to illuminate her room.

Her hands were clasped so tightly her knuckles showed white, and though her knees ached with a dull, insistence, she refused to rise. She would bear it. She must bear it.

“Forgive me, O Lord,” she whispered, eyes squeezed shut. “I have sinned grievously this day. I struck poor Josephine—laid my hand upon her in anger. I, who am called to meekness and charity, lost my temper like some common scold. Have mercy upon me, a wretched sinner.” She paused, breath trembling. Then, she snapped her head to the side, as though having a whispered argument with an invisible confessor.

“But she *did* deserve it. She has a sharp, mocking tongue, that one. She tempted me, pushed me beyond patience. And a servant must learn respect. Papa always said a firm hand corrects where words fail. Surely discipline is no sin when justly given?”

Yet the guilt returned like a tide. “No. I enjoyed it too much. That is the wickedness. My heart took delight in her humiliation, even if only for a moment. I felt…powerful. And that cannot be right. Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned. Forgive me my pride and my cruelty.”

Then, another concern pressed itself to her mind. “A Catholic! In our very household?”

Josephine’s slip of the tongue still rang in her ears: “one of *us*.” The girl had not fully renounced Rome; Jane was certain of it now.

What if she whispered Popish prayers in secret? What if she carried letters for recusants, or worse, plotted against the Queen? Surely, there were still partisans for Bloody Mary who had not been exposed.

To harbor a Papist was dangerous. Treasonous, even. Jane remembered seeing a naked woman, standing polloried on the scaffold, pelted with mud. That was the least that awaited a Romanish heretic.

Then, Jane imagined Josephine suffering that fate. “I cannot turn her in,” she confessed aloud, voice cracking. “I cannot. She is alone here, friendless, far from her own people. To send her to the authorities would be her death. Forgive my weakness, Lord. Strengthen me against any tenderness to heresy. But, please, show Josephine the true light of the Gospel. Open her eyes to the errors of Rome, that she may recant and be saved. Let her see the plain truth of salvation by faith, through Christ alone.”

She bowed her head lower, cheeks burning with a different shame. The memory of the spanking burned in her mind’s eye. The soft give of Josephine’s flesh beneath her palm, the small jolt of surprise she felt from the impact, the way Josephine’s breath had hitched, as well as her own. A

strange, unfamiliar heat bloomed in Jane's belly. Trembling, she stumbled to reach her chamber pot, wondering if she would vomit. But nothing came of it.

Jane gulped for cool air, until the burning sensation vanished, and her vision cleared. "I must have been mad with anger," she told herself firmly.

Then she returned to her bedside, and knelt to finish her prayers. "Or perhaps some foul spirit entered me for a moment, tempting me to cruelty and…some evil deed. Oh, Lord, protect me from such possession. And do not withhold chastisement from me. Grant me true repentance, that I may amend my ways and walk soberly before Thee. Amen."

Finally, she rose stiffly, knees protesting, and crossed to the silver-backed mirror that hung upon the wall. It was a rare and precious thing, a kingly gift from her father to commemorate her fifteenth birthday, and her coming of age. As a child she had only ever glimpsed herself dimly in a still pool of water. But the clear reflection of the mirror seemed just as uncanny as ever, almost miraculous. This was really her, as she was. Her face was pale, her auburn hair falling in a loose tumble. And her eyes were so tired.

"Josephine?" she called softly, glancing toward the inner door. Then, it struck Jane how long her maid had been gone. Jane narrowed her eyes, and opened the door. "Josephine? Are you fetching a warming pan?"

But the hall was empty.

Jane huffed, crossing her arms, muttering. "She went to bed without me? She deserves a good hiding just for that."

Jane caught herself at once, and pressed her fingers against her eyes. "No—no, forgive me that thought, Lord. Grant me patience. I will speak to her tomorrow, rebuke her *gently*, and forgive her for her failings. We shall be friends again. I will not let the sun set upon my anger."

With a sigh she pulled a fresh shift and woolen nightgown from the trunk, and began to change herself. As Jane pulled off her old shift—or her *chemise*, as Josephine would have called it—the fabric pooled at her feet, and Jane caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Stepping out of the rumpled cloth, she approached the reflected image and turned sideways, with a mix of curiosity and shame on her face as twisted her hips and gazed downward at her own bottom: pale, unmarked, untouched.

Shivering, Jane pulled on her new shift, feeling how the hem of the fabric lightly enveloped her, savoring the cool tickle against her hindquarters. "How poor Josephine must be suffering now,"

And how grateful she felt to not be going to bed with a sore, aching backside. Jane winced at the vulgarity of her own thoughts. "I was brutish. Merciless. Poor Josephine must be bruised, weeping, all alone in her little room."

Slowly, deliberately, Jane lifted the hem of her shift, to examine her own bottom. Perhaps, on such a cold, lonely night, going to bed with a scorched, hot bottom would not be so bad after all. If only Jane's father were here. If she went to him and confessed her sinful wrath, surely Papa would have justly given her a bright red bottom, to match poor Josephine's.

Then, Jane froze at the sudden sound of footsteps, coming from the corridor right outside her door. Heart hammering, she dropped the shift and whirled, clutching the cloth at her chest. If anyone should see her like this—half-naked, peering at herself like some vain strumpet—the shame would be unbearable. She leapt to grab her nightgown, desperately thrusting it on, only to hear the footsteps pass by her door, and slowly fade. Jane exhaled shakily.

At last she climbed into bed, drew the chilly covers to her chin, and closed her eyes.

Sleep came fitfully, then plunged her into a dream so vivid, she briefly realized she must be dreaming. In the dream she was no longer Lady Jane, but a plain, clumsy servant girl in a grand French château.

Her hands trembled as she fumbled with the lacings of a magnificent gown worn by a haughty young princess. Jane immediately recognized the princess as Josephine, but she was different: taller, older, imperious, her cropped hair now a cascade of brazen curls beneath a jeweled cap. The Lady Josephine's eyes sparkling with amused disdain.

And then, something strange happened. Jane became lucid, and knew that she must be dreaming. If she wanted, she could wake up, right now. But as the world grew cloudy, Jane chose to stay asleep, and see the rest of the dream. And the moment she made that choice, the knowledge that she was dreaming faded into nothingness. The dream was her reality now.

"You sow!" the princess snapped in perfect, imperious French. "You have pulled too tight again. Do you wish to strangle your mistress?"

"I—I beg pardon, Highness," Jane stammered in her faltering French, cheeks flaming.

The princess turned, skirts rustling like thunder. "Pardon is not enough. You must be taught. *Je dois te donner une bonne fessée*."

As she realized her limited grasp of French was failing her, Jane squinted, confused, and answered in her own English. "Give me…une bonne…give me what, madam?"

Josephine smiled, slowly, wickedly. "A good spanking, little fool. Over my knee. At once."

Before Jane could protest, a strong hand seized her wrist and drew her forward. She found herself tumbled across the princess's lap, skirts rumpled up, before her shift was torn aside to expose her naked hindquarters.

Josephine's first slap landed across Jane's buttocks with ringing force, far harder than anything Jane had ever felt, even from her father. Jane yelped, kicking her legs wildly in a futile attempt at escape.

"Hold still," Josephine commanded, her voice low and certain. "This is what happens to foolish, careless little girls."

Smack after smack fell, steady and unrelenting, until Jane's felt her bottom blazing and tears streaming down her face. Each swat carried a strange mingling of shame, but also something deeper, like a hot knife in her belly. It was a feeling that Jane could not name.

Jane heard Josephine's cutting voice, echoing from behind her, as if from across the sea. "So *dainty*…so *delicate*."

Jane twisted, holding up her hands as if in prayer. "Please, ma'dam! Have mercy!"

But Princess Josephine only smiled, and raised her hand high. "Truly, I tell you, as you have done to the *least* of these…"

Then, the spanking began anew.

Jane writhed, sobbed, begged, and howled, yet Princess Josephine held her fast, and as Jane shut her eyes tight, it was as if the entire world began to burn away, to be replaced by Hell fire.

Then the world tilted. Jane jolted awake in her own bed, drenched in cold sweat, heart pounding against her ribs.

She sat up, clutching the sheets, staring into the moonlit dark.

"A dream—but, what can it mean?" she whispered.

The memory of the spanking still lingered. Josephine's firm hand, the sting, the sense of helplessness as Jane surrendered to her fate. Jane pressed her clammy palms against her burning cheeks and lay back down, trembling.

She did not sleep again that night.

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The next morning dawned gray and chill, the light filtering weakly through the leaded windows of the study chamber. Lady Jane sat at the narrow oak table with her back ramrod straight, though her eyelids drooped and dark circles shadowed her eyes like bruises. She had scarcely slept; the dream had chased her through the small hours, leaving her feverish and unsettled.

Josephine sat beside her, posture relaxed, one ankle crossed over the other beneath the table as though she had not a care in the world.

Master Elias, their Latin tutor, an elderly scholar with a voice like dry parchment, stood before a lectern, pointer in hand, expounding upon St. Jerome's *Vulgate* with all the enthusiasm of a man reading a laundry list. "And so we see in Ephesians 5:23: *caput mulieris vir est, sicut et Christus caput est ecclesiae*. Or, 'or the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.' This hierarchy is divine, immutable. Now consider the ablative absolute in Jerome's commentary…"

His drone faded into background noise as Lady Jane leaned ever so slightly toward Josephine and hissed under her breath. "Where *were* you last night? You were meant to attend me before bed. I was left to undress myself like some common chambermaid."

Josephine's lips curved in the barest smirk. She kept her eyes on the open book before her, but whispered back just as softly. "Oh? And do you plan to spank me again for it, m'lady? Or was last night's performance enough to satisfy your sense of justice?"

Jane's face flushed scarlet. She opened her mouth to retort—something about prideful insolence—but at that moment Master Elias's pointer slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor. The sound was like a gunshot in the quiet room.

Both girls froze. Jane's heart slammed against her ribs; she could already feel the phantom sting of the cane across her palms or worse, the backs of her thighs.

Only last year, she had been caned once inattention, and still remembered the humiliation, even more vividly than the pain. Jane was rarely caned, but each caning always seemed worse than the last in her memory.

Jane snapped her mouth shut and stared fixedly at her book.

Josephine, unperturbed, slid a folded scrap of paper across the table beneath the cover of her sleeve. Jane hesitated, then unfolded it beneath the table's edge.

Josephine's note read, *"If we must quarrel, let us do it in ink. Less risk of Master Elias overhearing your righteous indignation."*

Jane's jaw tightened. She snatched up her quill, scribbled hastily, and passed the note back. *"I am sorry I lost my temper yesterday. It was wrong of me to strike you in anger. But you provoked me sorely, and the correction was just. A naughty servant must learn respect."*

Josephine read it, eyebrows lifting in mock offense. She wrote back quickly, her script looping and insolent. "*If it is fair for you to spank me when I am <u>naughty</u>, would it not also be fair for me to spank you, should you ever prove naughty yourself?"*

Jane's hand trembled as she read the words. Heat flooded her face; the dream flashed behind her eyes—Josephine's lap, the firm smacks, her own helpless wriggling. She bent over the paper, writing furiously. "*It would be perfectly just for me to receive correction if I deserved it. But such chastisement is the duty of my father or my instructors. Not yours. You are my servant. The order of things is clear: I hold authority over you, as Christ holds authority over the Church, or a husband over his wife. Therefore, no, it would not be fair for you to punish me. I have the right, and the responsibility, to correct you."*

Josephine cooly scribbled a reply, and tossed the paper back with a casual flick of her wrist. The letters were written in a brisk, sharp hand. "*When you say Christ is the head of the Church, you of course refer to The One, True, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?"*

Jane stared at the words. Fury surged through her so quickly she crushed the note in her fist, the paper crackling audibly.

Their eyes met. Jane glared, her cheeks aflame, while Josephine regarded her with that same mysterious half-smile, as though the entire exchange were a delightful game.

Then, Master Elias cleared his throat. The sound was thunderous in the sudden silence.

"Ladies," he said, his voice flat with displeasure, "if the two of you find my instruction so tedious that you must pass secret notes under my very nose, perhaps a taste of the rod will help you *sit still* and attend."

Jane's stomach plummeted. Josephine merely folded her hands neatly on the table.

Master Alias strolled to the short wooden table that rested in front of his lectern, and rapped it sharply with his pointing rod.

"Stand, both of you. Bend over the table. Skirts up, shifts likewise. Six strokes each should suffice to remind you of decorum."

Jane's legs felt leaden as she rose. She shot Josephine one last furious look. "*Are you happy now? We're both in trouble because of you!"* thought Jane, willing to make her fury plain on her face..

But Josephine only met her gaze with serene amusement, that enigmatic smile never wavering.

As Master Elias fetched a long, thin cane which hung from the wall, they both raised their skirts all the way above their waists, and rested their palms against the rough, scarred oak of the short table, side by side.

Master Elias measured the cane in his hands, glancing down at them with a solemn look that failed to conceal his satisfaction. “Hmm, what’s this? Woolen drawers? Let’s have these down as well. Josephine, help prepare Lady Jane, then assume the angle yourself.”

Her face composed, Josephine stood and moved to pull down Lady Jane’s drawers. They were not yet worn universally, but some of the English nobility had started adopting French-style drawers, especially during the cold winter months. This was despite the moral outrage the English always felt toward any French fashion.

Jane caught her breath as she felt Josephine exposing her from behind, before Josephine dropped her own drawers and rejoined Jane at the table.

Master Elias tested the feel of the cane with a practiced swing of his arm, once, twice, then drew the cane back, all the way behind his head.

The first stroke landed across both girls’ bottoms at the same instant, a sharp, searing, line of fire that made Jane gasp. Josephine only let out a small, almost amused, hiss of discomfort.

After the second, cutting stroke, Jane reared her head up and wailed, shocked as always by the force of the cane, no matter how many times she felt it. As Jane saw the gentle light of morning glittering through the window, above her, tears stained her eyes. Then she felt something brushing against her hand. Looking back, Jane saw Josephine, pressing her face against the desk as she writhed in agony. Not knowing what else to do, Jane held tight onto Josephine’s hand, and squeezed it.

[End of Chapter 1]